

Sounds badly affect one in five

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Do you squirm at the sound of a fork scratching a plate or shudder when someone chews or sniffs loudly? Many people find these noises annoying, but nearly one in five UK adults suffer from misophonia (when a certain noise triggers an extreme reaction).



Scientists at the University of Oxford have been looking into how sounds affect people differently. They took a sample of 772 people – of all different ages and backgrounds – and played them 37 sounds that many people find irritating. These include chewing, coughing, dogs barking, sniffing repeatedly and slurping.

The people taking part in the study filled in a survey that included statements or questions about how certain noises made them feel. This showed that for some people, certain sounds made them feel helpless and anxious. However, 85% of people found the same common noises annoying but they didn't provoke such extreme reactions.

As part of the study, psychologists (experts in the brain and its functions) interviewed several of the people in the survey who believed that they had misophonia. They asked these people more detailed questions about their reactions to noises, focusing on whether it stopped them from going out to work or seeing their friends. This helped the researchers to work out who had misophonia.

The scientists said that feeling irritated by a sound is normal but people who suffered from misophonia felt angry or panicked. People who have it badly can find it affects their life because they are afraid of hearing a noise that triggers them and not being

able to escape it. They can also feel shame or embarrassment about being so bothered. Only 14% of the people in the study had heard of misophonia. It was identified in 2001 but was only acknowledged as a disorder in 2022. The researchers hope that the study will raise awareness of misophonia and help people who have the condition.

Sweat can have a calming effect

A study has found that the smell of sweat can actually help people to feel more calm, rather than disgusted. Researchers at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, worked with women who were suffering from social anxiety. The women seemed to respond better to treatment when they were sniffing samples of other people's body odour at the same time. The researchers found that those who sniffed the sweaty whiffs cut their anxiety scores by 39%. The scientists believe that the smell of sweat opens up the brain to emotions, and this has a calming effect.

NASA has extended the life of a sensor that scans the world's forests from space and passes on information about the environment.

In December 2018, the US space agency NASA launched the Global Ecosystem Dynamics Investigation (GEDI) from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, US. It was attached to the International Space Station (ISS) and provided the first 3D map of the world's forests. GEDI is about the size of a fridge and has helped scientists better understand the loss of Earth's biodiversity (the variety of plants and animals). It does this by using lasers to measure the structure and health of the Earth's forests.

The sensor was set to be destroyed this year but forest experts protested. GEDI is in storage on the ISS and will be reinstalled in 18 months when another mission is completed. It could last up until 2031, when the ISS will stop being used. Scientist Laura Duncanson called the news "incredibly exciting at a time when we need to understand how forests are changing".

In this month's The Week Junior Science+Nature we show you why you don't need to scan the Serengeti or root through the Amazon rainforest to find amazing wildlife – it's right under your nose here in the UK! You can also meet some of the young people striving to save the planet, uncover the science behind the circus and discover the answer to the question: do all animals have belly buttons?

And don't miss our guide to spotting the joys of spring.

Snow globe

Geraint Radford took a close-up of this moss in Swansea, Wales.